



ASHA
American
Speech-Language-Hearing
Association



2023

Public Policy Agenda

Your Guide to the Public Policy
Priorities for Audiologists and
Speech-Language Pathologists

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA)

is the national professional, scientific, and credentialing association for 223,000 members and affiliates who are audiologists; speech-language pathologists (SLP); speech, language, and hearing scientists; audiology and speech-language pathology support personnel; and students.

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Introduction

The political and public policy landscape is partisan, factionalized, and uncertain. Across this landscape, audiologists and SLPs continue to face a number of significant challenges that range from high caseloads to coverage of services.

Advocacy is about effecting positive change. Advocacy is about partnership. Advocacy is about perseverance. Over the past 2 years, ASHA's strategic approach to advocacy has radically shifted in response to the seismic shifts in how we interact, communicate, and work—as well as how we conceptualize public health, education, and service delivery. In these challenging times, it is critical to remain focused and engaged on efforts that yield a meaningful impact on the professional lives of audiologists, speech-language pathologists, and speech, language, and hearing scientists. It is critical to remain mindful of the fact that successful advocacy demands the active participation of *all* ASHA members working in partnership with ASHA staff and allied stakeholders. And it is critical that we persist together through these times and the times to come.

The *2023 ASHA Public Policy Agenda* (or “the Agenda”) establishes a number of priorities aimed at ensuring that the value of audiologists and SLPs in schools, health care, early intervention, private practice, and higher education settings is adequately reflected in rapidly evolving laws, regulations, and payment policies. The Agenda further reflects ASHA's ongoing commitment to clients, patients, and students; evidence-based practice and outcomes; public health; the highest standards of professional ethics; a diverse professional workforce; equitable and inclusive policies and practices; and non-discrimination on the basis of the full range of diversity, including but not limited to ability, age, ethnicity, gender identity or expression, national origin, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and/or veteran status. Finally, the Agenda responds to the reality of today's political and public policy landscape—and the impact that key issues of public interest have on ASHA members and the clients, patients, and students they serve.

ASHA looks forward to working collaboratively with lawmakers, policymakers, decision makers, and allied stakeholders to advance the public policy priorities in the *2023 ASHA Public Policy Agenda*.



MAKE

AN

IMPACT



Make an Impact!

ASHA employs an unmatched team of 20 government affairs and public policy professionals who proactively and collaboratively partner with ASHA members to advance the priorities of the annual *Agenda* by

- undertaking robust policy analysis and development;
- building and leveraging strategic relationships with influential lawmakers and policymakers;
- communicating regularly with lawmakers, policymakers, other decision makers, allied stakeholders, consumers, and the general public; and
- providing dynamic opportunities for ASHA members to advocate for positive public policy change.

Providing dynamic and convenient opportunities for ASHA members to advocate is critical to ASHA's overall success! **As a member of ASHA, your stories, experiences, and perspectives are incredibly valuable and have a powerful impact.** By working together, we can most effectively educate, inform, and persuade lawmakers, policymakers, and other decision makers to take actions that benefit the professions as well as the clients, patients, and students we serve.

ASHA members can become informed and involved in a number of ways. Becoming an effective advocate is easy and takes very little time!

- Follow ASHA Advocacy.
 -  Facebook ([@ASHAAdvocacy](https://www.facebook.com/ASHAAdvocacy))
 -  Twitter ([@ASHAAdvocacy](https://twitter.com/ASHAAdvocacy))
- Sign up for *ASHA Headlines* to receive the *ASHA Advocate*:
asha.org/publications/eneews/headlines
- Take action on ASHA's advocacy issues:
takeaction.asha.org
- Learn about ASHA-PAC:
asha.org/advocacy/pac

A woman with long brown hair is looking towards a young girl with blonde hair. The girl is holding a white card with a green outline of the letter 'O'. The background is a light-colored wall with a pattern of small grey dots. A purple speech bubble with white text is positioned in the center, and a white speech bubble with teal text is below it. A teal speech bubble with white text is at the bottom. A yellow bar is at the top left, and a yellow bar is at the bottom left.

What is a *Technical Assistance Center*?

The U.S. Department of Education has developed several Technical Assistance Centers to provide state, district and school administrators, teachers, school support staff, communities, and families with resources and support on specific issues.¹

ASHA is advocating for the U.S. Department of Education to establish a dedicated Technical Assistance Center on communication disorders that is focused on priorities for school-based SLPs and educational audiologists including—but not limited to—workload management, equitable pay, rural capacity building, and school-based telepractice.

The Technical Assistance Center would provide resources, guidance and best practices, model programs, and support to address staffing shortages for audiologists and SLPs working in schools to ensure the delivery of effective services for all students with disabilities.

¹Source: U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.-a). Technical assistance centers. <https://oese.ed.gov/offices/office-of-formula-grants/programs-initiatives-oshs/technical-assistance-centers/>

Schools Priorities

School-based SLPs and educational audiologists provide evidence-based identification, assessment, treatment, and management of services in school settings. These services develop effective communication skills to enhance social interaction and improve educational outcomes. It is essential for ASHA to further strengthen its partnership with the U.S. Department of Education to support school-based SLPs and educational audiologists in key areas—including, but not limited to, caseload/workload management, capacity building, and wages. ASHA has identified the following schools-related priorities in the *2023 Agenda*:

- Advocate for the establishment of a dedicated Technical Assistance Center on communication disorders in the U.S. Department of Education.
- Advocate for state-based incentives, such as salary supplements, that are designed to support a robust workforce.
- Advocate for initiatives that expand technology capacity to support the provision of services to students via telepractice.
- Advocate for the inclusion of educational audiologists and school-based SLPs as peer reviewers for the U.S. Department of Education.
- Advocate for federal funding and policies through the fiscal year 2024 appropriations process that support the identification, assessment, treatment, and management of speech, language, feeding/swallowing, cognitive, hearing, and balance disorders.



Covering services delivered via telehealth/telepractice maintains access to timely quality care and improves the patient's experience of care.²

Telepractice is an appropriate model of service delivery for audiologists and SLPs and may be the primary mode of service delivery or may supplement in-person services.³

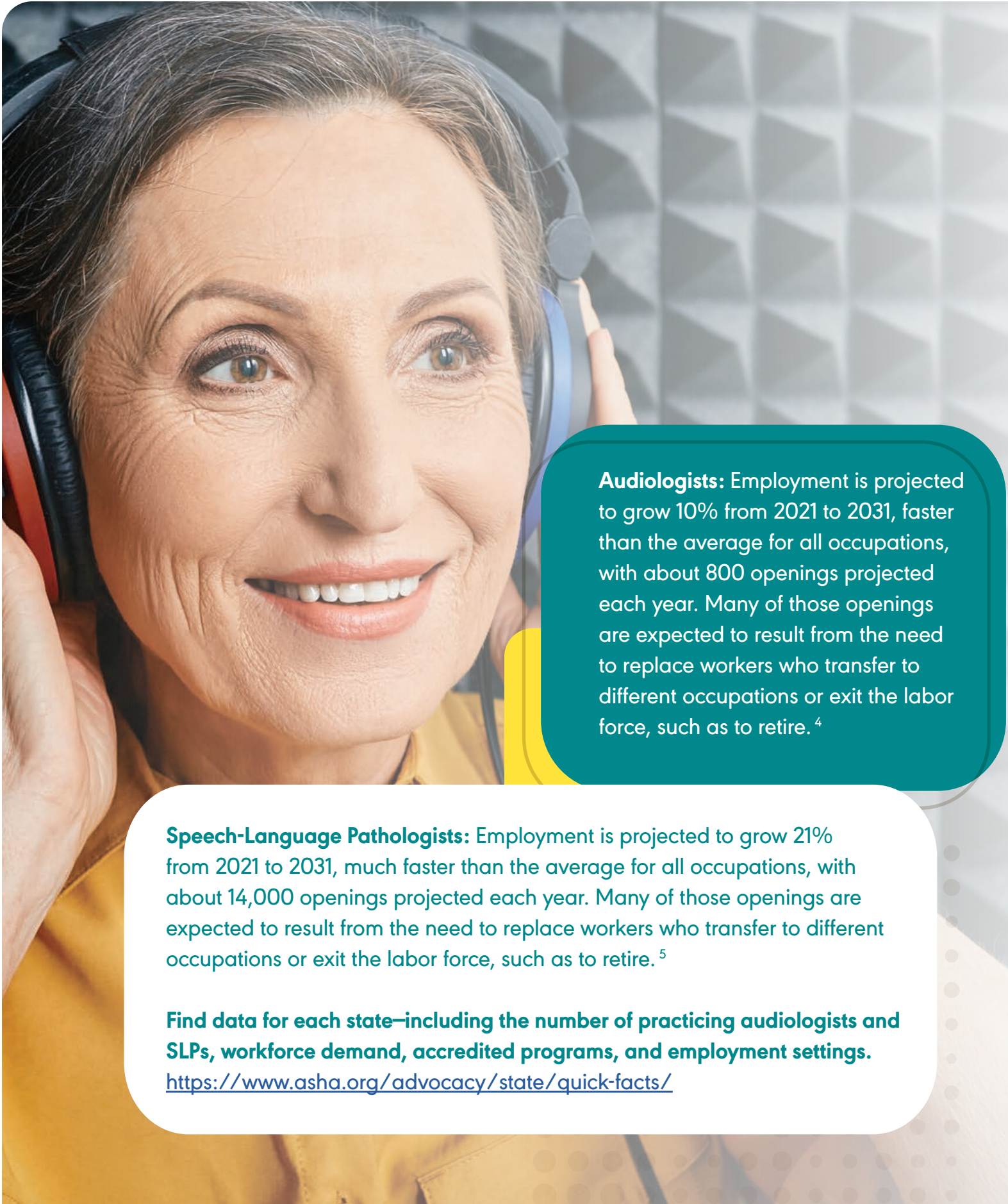
² Source: American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2022, April). Coverage and reimbursement for telepractice services. [ASHA member survey].

³ Source: American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (n.d.-b). Telepractice [ASHA Practice Portal]. <https://www.asha.org/practice-portal/professional-issues/telepractice/>

Health Care Priorities

Audiologists and SLPs provide medically necessary services to maximize health and functional outcomes for quality of life. It is essential that (a) all public and private payers comprehensively cover audiology and speech-language pathology services regardless of service delivery model; (b) payments fully reflect the value of the service as well as the training and expertise of the service provider; and (c) emerging value-based health care delivery systems recognize the importance of including both audiologists and SLPs. ASHA has identified the following health care priorities in the *2023 Agenda*:

- Advocate for comprehensive access to, coverage of, and equitable payment for audiology and speech-language pathology services, including early intervention services.
- Advocate for expanded and permanent coverage of services provided by means of telepractice—including, but not limited to, pay parity and policies that explicitly incorporate the full scope of practice of audiology and speech-language pathology.
- Advocate for maintaining the critical role of SLPs in skilled nursing facilities as well as productivity standards that support clinical excellence, ethical practice, and high-quality service delivery.
- Advocate for the inclusion and successful participation of audiologists and SLPs in value-based care, alternative payment models, and other emerging health care delivery systems.
- Advocate for federal funding and policies through the fiscal year 2024 appropriations process that support the identification, assessment, treatment, and management of speech, language, feeding/swallowing, cognitive, hearing, and balance disorders.



Audiologists: Employment is projected to grow 10% from 2021 to 2031, faster than the average for all occupations, with about 800 openings projected each year. Many of those openings are expected to result from the need to replace workers who transfer to different occupations or exit the labor force, such as to retire.⁴

Speech-Language Pathologists: Employment is projected to grow 21% from 2021 to 2031, much faster than the average for all occupations, with about 14,000 openings projected each year. Many of those openings are expected to result from the need to replace workers who transfer to different occupations or exit the labor force, such as to retire.⁵

Find data for each state—including the number of practicing audiologists and SLPs, workforce demand, accredited programs, and employment settings.

<https://www.asha.org/advocacy/state/quick-facts/>

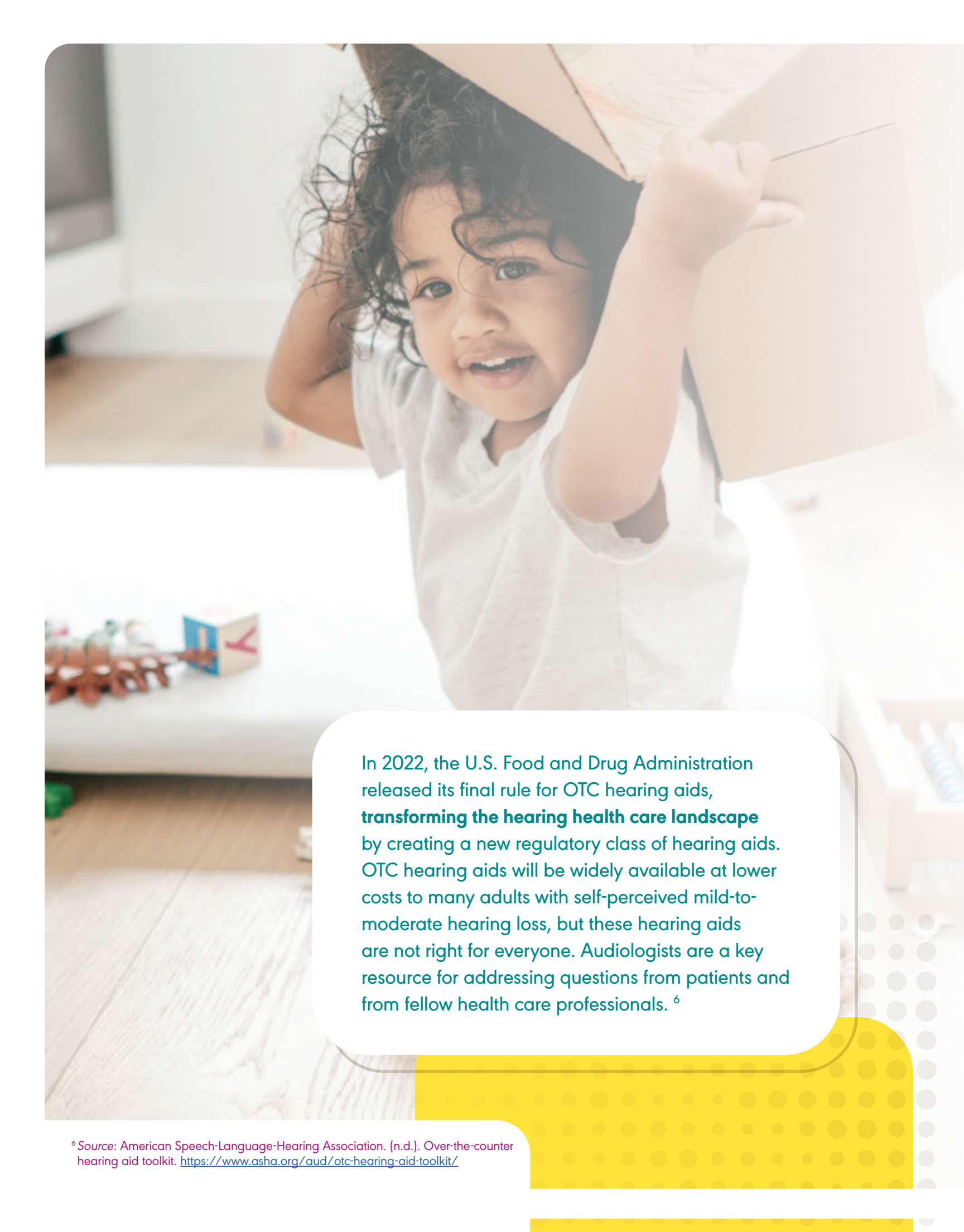
⁴ Source: U.S. Department of Labor. (n.d.-a). Occupational outlook handbook, audiologists. <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/audiologists.htm>

⁵ Source: U.S. Department of Labor. (n.d.-b). Occupational outlook handbook, speech-language pathologists. <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/speech-language-pathologists.htm>

Professional Practice and Workforce Priorities

Audiologists and SLPs are trained to identify, assess, treat, and manage speech, language, feeding/swallowing, cognitive, hearing, and balance disorders. It is critical that the *Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology Interstate Compact* be successfully operationalized and expanded, that licensure and certification requirements be preserved, and that the ability to practice to the fullest extent of one's education and training be supported. Furthermore, it is important that ongoing advocacy supports appropriate and safe working environments—and that public policies align with the standards of ASHA's Assistants Certification Program. ASHA has identified the following professional practice and workforce priorities in the *2023 Agenda*:

- Advocate for the successful operationalization and further adoption of the *Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology Interstate Compact*.
- Advocate for licensure and certification standards, which (a) ensure that audiology and speech-language pathology services are provided by individuals with appropriate academic and clinical training as well as (b) support the ability of audiologists and SLPs to practice to the fullest extent of their education and training.
- Advocate for public policies that support appropriate and safe working environments.
- Advocate for public policies that align with the standards of ASHA's Assistants Certification Program—including, but not limited to, appropriate credentials, roles and responsibilities, and supervision standards.

A young child with curly hair is playing with a cardboard box in a playroom. The child is wearing a white t-shirt and is holding the box up to their face. The room has a wooden floor, a white rug, and various toys like blocks and a toy train. The background is slightly blurred, showing a white wall and a window.

In 2022, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration released its final rule for OTC hearing aids, **transforming the hearing health care landscape** by creating a new regulatory class of hearing aids. OTC hearing aids will be widely available at lower costs to many adults with self-perceived mild-to-moderate hearing loss, but these hearing aids are not right for everyone. Audiologists are a key resource for addressing questions from patients and from fellow health care professionals. ⁶

⁶ Source: American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (n.d.). Over-the-counter hearing aid toolkit. <https://www.asha.org/aud/otc-hearing-aid-toolkit/>

Client, Patient, and Student Priorities

Each client, patient, and student is unique. It is essential that public policies are structured to support safe and proper utilization of technology, informed treatment decision making, and enforcement of existing screening mandates. ASHA has identified the following priorities for clients, patients, and students in the *2023 Agenda*:

- Educate policymakers and payers on (a) the utilization and implementation of over-the-counter (OTC) hearing aids and (b) the impact that OTCs are having on constituents and consumers with perceived mild-to-moderate hearing loss and on the provision of hearing health care services.
- Advocate for the continued ability of clients, patients, students, caregivers, audiologists, and SLPs to make informed early intervention and treatment decisions with equitable access to objective and evidence-based resources.
- Advocate for the completion of a Government Accountability Office (GAO) study authorized by Congress on disparities in newborn hearing screening follow-up services.
- Advocate for state compliance with screening and hearing service mandates under Medicaid's Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment benefit.
- Advocate for greater beneficiary choice when using hearing device benefits offered by Medicare Advantage plans.



According to a U.S. GAO study, a more diverse health care workforce—including a more diverse group of providers in training—is important because

- racial and ethnic minority groups disproportionately live in areas with provider shortages;
- patients who receive care from members of their own racial and ethnic background tend to have better outcomes; and
- members of racial and ethnic minority groups are more likely to practice in shortage areas.⁷

⁷ Source: U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2009). Graduate medical education: Trends in training and student debt, 09-438R. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-09-438r.pdf>

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Priorities

ASHA holds a strong commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) that directly addresses systemic racism and institutional inequity. Ultimately, the efficacy and sustainability of audiology and speech-language pathology services rests upon an understanding of and respect for each client, patient, and student—as well as the provider. It is essential that a culturally responsive workforce is promoted, that a diversified body of audiology and speech-language pathology students is supported, and that discrimination is not tolerated. ASHA has identified the following DEI priorities in the *2023 Agenda*:

- Advocate for or engage in anti-discriminatory policies and practices that support audiologists, SLPs, and people with communication disorders in areas that include ability, age, ethnicity, gender identity or expression, national origin, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and/or veteran status.
- Advocate for a diverse population of undergraduate and graduate students in accredited speech, language, and hearing science programs.
- Advocate to policymakers for greater awareness of different linguistic systems, the impact of language and dialects on the provision of services, and the role of audiologists and SLPs in promoting a culturally responsive workforce.
- Advocate for greater coverage of services by highlighting the impact that social determinants of health have on people with communication disorders.



The 2023 Public Policy Agenda was developed by the

2022 Government Affairs and Public Policy Board,

which consists of the following members:

- **David Alexander**, CCC-A, Member and ASHA-PAC Board Chair
- **Kelly Ball**, CCC-SLP, Member
- **Arynn Byrd**, CCC-SLP, Early Career Professional
- **Katie Kendhammer**, CCC-A, Member
- **John King**, CCC-A, Member
- **Louis Malerba**, CCC-SLP, Member
- **Michelle Mannebach**, Consultant
- **Sheila Mathew**, NSSLHA Member
- **Jeffrey P Regan**, Ex Officio
- **Deborah Ross Swain**, CCC-SLP, Board Liaison (*effective 9/1/22*)
- **Seijra Toogood**, CCC-SLP, Chair
- **Julie Verhoff Matinez**, CCC-A, Member
- **Lindsay Ward**, CCC-SLP, Member
- **Doanne Ward-Williams**, CCC-SLP, Board Liaison (*through 8/31/22*)

ASHA's Government Affairs and Public Policy Board is charged with (a) developing the Association's annual public policy agenda for adoption by the ASHA Board of Directors; (b) ensuring that ASHA members' strategic needs and interests are represented in the Association's annual public policy agenda; (c) providing ongoing coordination of communication with other ASHA committees, councils, boards, members, and state speech-language-hearing associations concerning the legislative, regulatory, and other public policy activities and initiatives of the Association; and (d) making recommendations to—and working with—the ASHA National Office staff to develop strategies to achieve the public policy agenda of the Association.



AUDIOLOGISTS

Audiologists specialize in preventing and assessing hearing and balance disorders as well as providing audiology treatment, including hearing aids.

Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) identify, assess, and treat speech, language, cognitive communication, and swallowing disorders.

Audiologists and **SLPs** work in a variety of settings including schools, health care facilities (in-patient, outpatient, private practice), and universities.



Audiologists and SLPs
provide treatment to
people of all ages, from
infants to older adults.

SPEECH -LANG UAGE PATHO LOGISTS

ASHA NATIONAL OFFICE

2200 Research Boulevard
Rockville, MD 20850-3289 USA
Local: 301-296-5700
www.asha.org



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